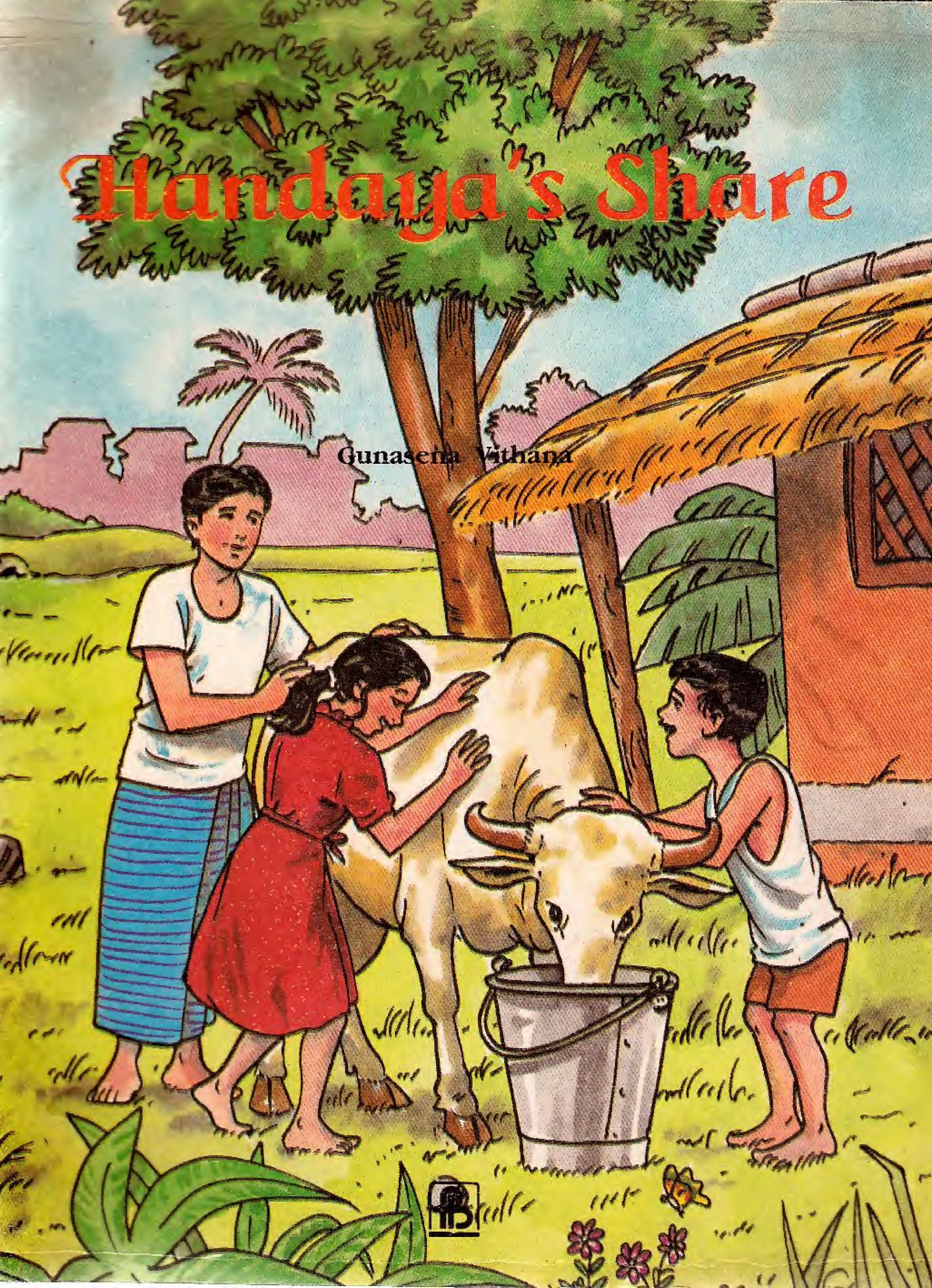


Handaya's Share

Gunaseena Vithana



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by

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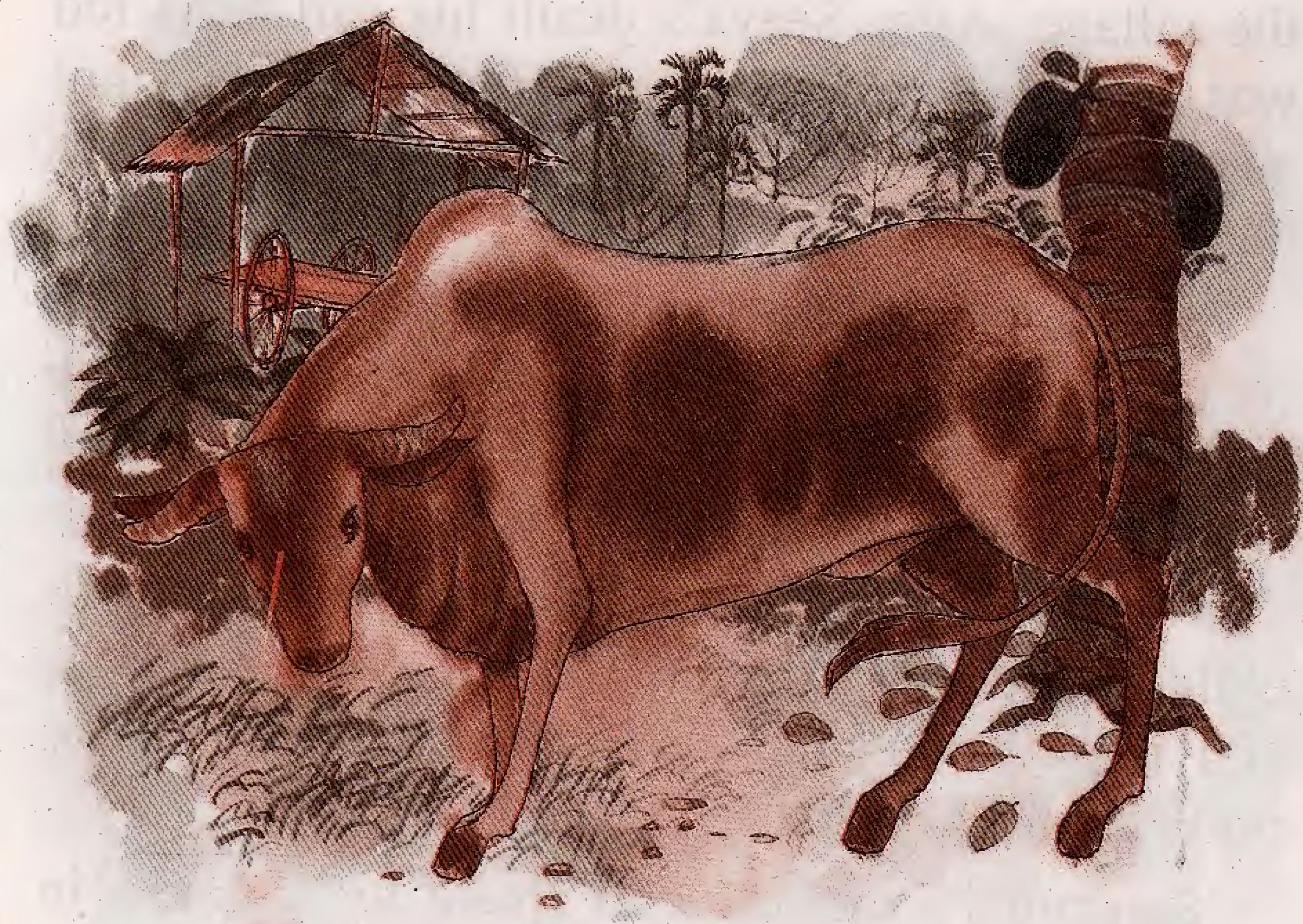
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When Sadiris Seeya* was alive his cart was drawn by Handaya. Just before Seeya died he gave up his carting job and released Handaya. After that Handaya received the sympathy of everyone in the village and came to be known as “Pin Handaya”. He would roam everywhere in the village the whole day and find something to eat. In the evening



* Seeya : Grandfather

he would come to Seeya's cart shed and lay down there. He had got used to this routine.

Being weary, very often he would not even move his tail as he shuffled along with his snout almost touching the ground due to the droop of his shoulders. Like Sadiris Seeya he too was old and infirm. Because he was branded "Free Handaya" he received better treatment than any other bull in the village. After Seeya's death his cart shed too was neglected and it decayed. Hence, Handaya got used to going to the temple at night to sleep near the preaching hall.

Now Handaya began his day by dragging himself very slowly towards Samantha's house early in the morning. Samantha's mother considered it very lucky to see Handaya at dawn everyday.

"Oh, Hando, did you come to see us? Our children are still sleeping Hando! Whatever it is, you must have been a relation of ours in your previous birth, Hando!"

Samantha's mother who spoke to Handaya in this manner gave him to eat parts of jackfruits, coconut refuse, left over rice, bananas and things

like that. It was also her habit to wipe the animal down with a rag.

Indunila who gets up on hearing her mother's voice pulls up Samantha who is still asleep by shaking him by his shoulder.

“Elder brother, elder brother, Handaya has come to meet you.”



Both of them jump out of bed and run towards the back of the house. Handaya, who was being fed by Mother raises his head and looks at the children. As usual Samantha goes to the animal and begins to stroke its nape. On some days Father too came to receive the animal. The cattle feed that he prepared was taken by Handaya with great relish.

One gloomy overcast day when Samantha's mother opened the door in the morning she did not see Handaya. Mother knew that even if the sun was delayed in coming out due to the clouds Handaya would never be late. She looked about as she stepped out on to the compound and called Handaya.

“Indho, Indho, Indho, come, come. Hando, come, come.....”

But he was not even to be seen. All at home started looking for Handaya around the garden. “Sometimes Handaya may still be lying near the preaching hall in the temple in his laziness,” Father said, coming into the house.

Samantha thought he should go there without delay.

“I’ll go there to see,” Samantha said, jumping over the stile as he said so, and flew away.

“It doesn’t matter. Let son go and find out. If nothing has happened to the animal the fellow would have been here by now!”

“Because of the heavy rains last night we don’t know whether Handaya got a chill or something like that.”

When mother and father were talking in this manner Indunila went to the stile to scan the road. Then she saw Samantha at a distance coming running. She realised that he was highly excited.

“Mother, elder brother is coming running!”

“The way he is coming it must be some bad news that he’s bringing.”

Samantha came wiping his eyes with both his palms and sat down for a while breathing deeply in and out.

“Oh, Mo..... ther, Ha..... Handaya has been... knock.....ed down by by a lorry and is in the drain by the culvert. No one has seen him till I went there. Handaya can't even get up. His eyes were filled with tears.....!”



When her elder brother was speaking Indunila listened with tears in her own eyes. Wiping her tears Mother ran to the backyard and called Siriyawathie Aunty of the next house.

“Sister Siriyawathie, Handaya has been knocked down by a lorry.”

“What? My heavens, what a crime!”



Tightening the cloth she was wearing at the waist she ran to the road with Mother. By that time Father had gone with the other elders of the village to the place where Handaya had fallen. Samantha's

friends too were there around Handaya who looked at everyone as if pleading, "Please save me."

It took a long time to take Handaya out of the drain. In the meantime Veda Seeya* who treated sick cattle had also come there.

"My God, are there lorry drivers who run down old people like us?" He asked, stroking the bull with a shivering hand. Then he tapped lightly with his walking stick the hind legs of the animal.

"Oh, my God, both legs of the poor fellow are



* *Veda Seeya* : Village Veterinary.

broken.” Veda Seeya who was squatted near Handaya muttered a charm for awhile.

The chief monk of the temple too came there and when Veda Seeya saw him he paid him his obeisance and saying, “By your leave,” started treating the animal. The chief monk turned towards the crowd and spoke to them.

“Now the Veda Seeya will treat the animal. If all you good people look after the animal well the fellow will recover. I and the young monks in the temple will look after Handaya till it can get up again.”

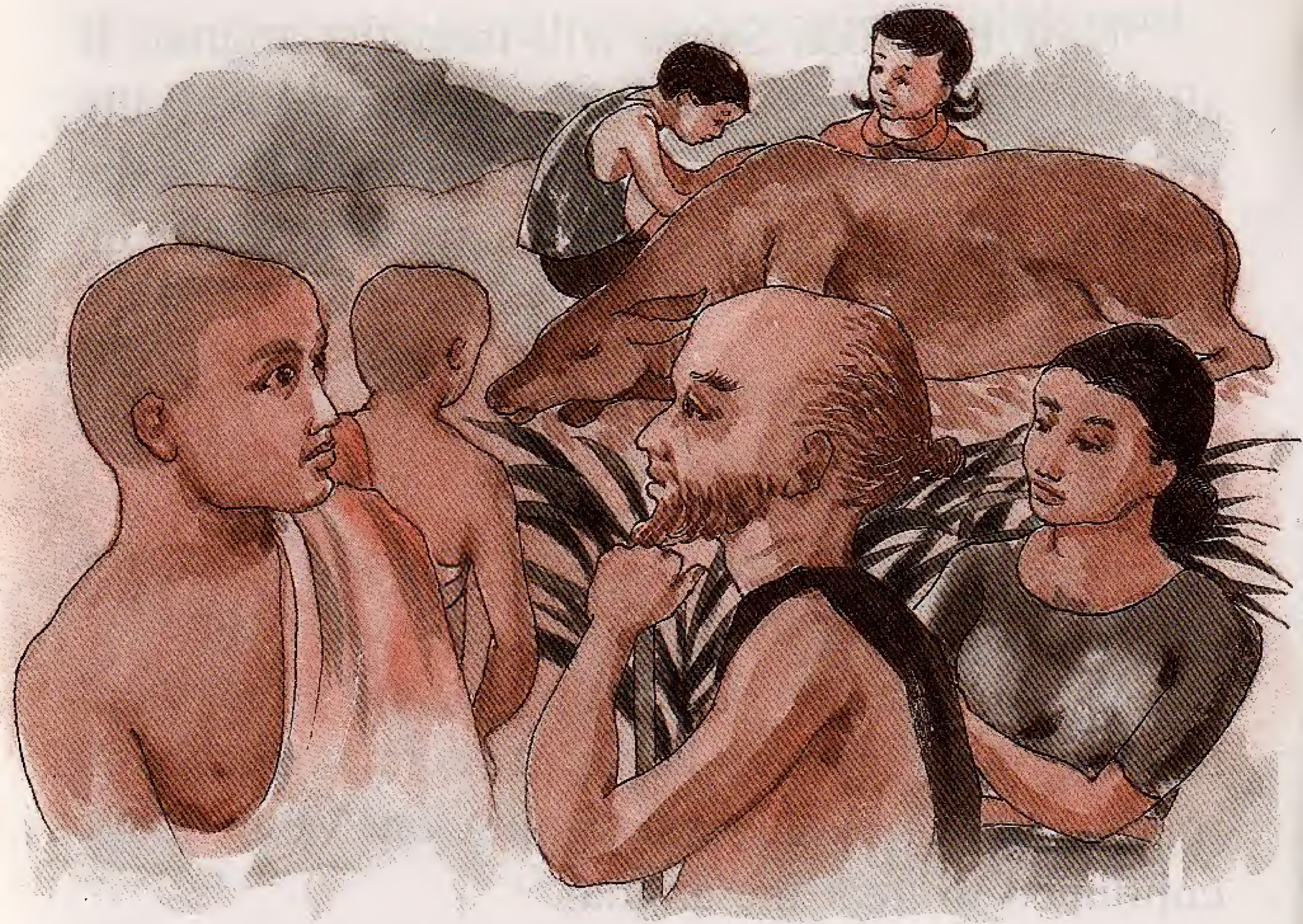
By that time the two young monks of the temple had come there.

As the animal had to be kept at one place for about a month for its treatment it was necessary to build a shed for him. Every one present went about to bring the necessary beams, rafters, cadjans and ropes. When all this was going on Veda Seeya continued to treat the animal.

“I’ll pound the five parts and bring it here. In

the meantime boil venivelgeta* and give a potful to the animal to drink.” Veda Seeya said this and went to bring the five parts. By that time Siriyawathie Aunty had already brought a jug of venivelgeta.

Seeya went to the thicket with the aid of his walking stick. No one knew what the five parts were. He safeguarded that as a top secret. He



* *Venivelgeta* : A Herb

would go to the jungle and pick leaves off trees and creepers or else take the leaves, flowers, roots, fruits and yams of several shrubs and vines, boil them and prepare the medicine. It was the two young monks who applied the medicine on this occasion on the hind limbs of the animal, tied splinters and bandaged them.

“With the blessings of the Triple Gem and the assistance of the gods the animal would be alright,” Veda Seeya said and paying his respects to the chief monk left the place taking the walking stick with him. Though it was his usual custom to accept whatever amount was given when treating an animal Veda Seeya treated Handaya like someone of his own.

After Veda Seeya left, the chief monk made a brief address to the gathered crowd and said that till Handaya recovered he should be given food, water and medicine by those present, on a voluntary basis like giving alms to the monks.

We’ll call it “Handaya’s share”, suggested Gunasiri Sadhu, one of the young monks.

That day everyone in the village decided among themselves “Handaya’s share” very willingly.



Every morning someone would come to Handaya and speak to him affectionately. Now the people were used to feeding him, applying oil on his limbs and fomenting them. Very often “Handaya’s share” consisted of grass, cattle feed, straw and rice. Handaya began to relish not only the biscuits and fruits he got from children but also the toffees and lozenges he got from them. Veda Seeya often came to check Handaya’s progress.

During this time one dark moonless night rains fell in the village. The rains came along with a heavy blowing and lightning and the trees shivered and swayed. Samantha awoke with the noise of the thunder and lightning and instantly thought of Handaya. He went to his mother and cuddling up to her, spoke.

“Mother.”

“Yes, son?” inquired the mother covering him with a blanket.

“Don’t know whether Handaya is getting wet!”

“I too was thinking of it, son.”

“Don’t know whether we’ll get floods like last time,” Indunila said, coming close to her mother and covering herself with her mother’s blanket.

“Today the rain is heavy. But that’s nothing to get frightened of. We have built the shed on high ground. There won’t be any floods there,” Father said opening the window and looking out.

What Samantha’s father said was true. As the

rain was reducing gradually there was nothing to worry about.



That day it was Samantha's family that had to bring "Handaya's share." Hence Samantha took it and went early to see Handaya. Indunila having got ready to school watched the road for her brother. She went to the stile several times but there were no signs of Samantha coming.

"Mother, brother has not come back yet. We'll get late to go to school today."

“That’s it child, when this boy goes to see Handaya he forgets that he has to go to school,” Mother said and looked about.

“Wait, I’ll go and bring him. By doing these I too get late to go to office,” Father said. But he could not even step out of the house, when he heard Indunila calling out from near the stile.

“Elder brother is coming running, Father!” she exclaimed.

“He must be bringing some good news. When he’s happy my son comes like that. There, there, he’s tooting like a car!”

As Mother said this Samantha came to the compound driving an imaginary car. “Peep peep peep get aside.”

He turned his shoulders and moved his arms like driving a car. “Brum.....brum,” he reversed, came forward, then reversed and came forward, then reversed and came forward again before he stopped it and entered the house, panting.

“Mother, Fa... Father, good... good news.”

“What’s it now?”

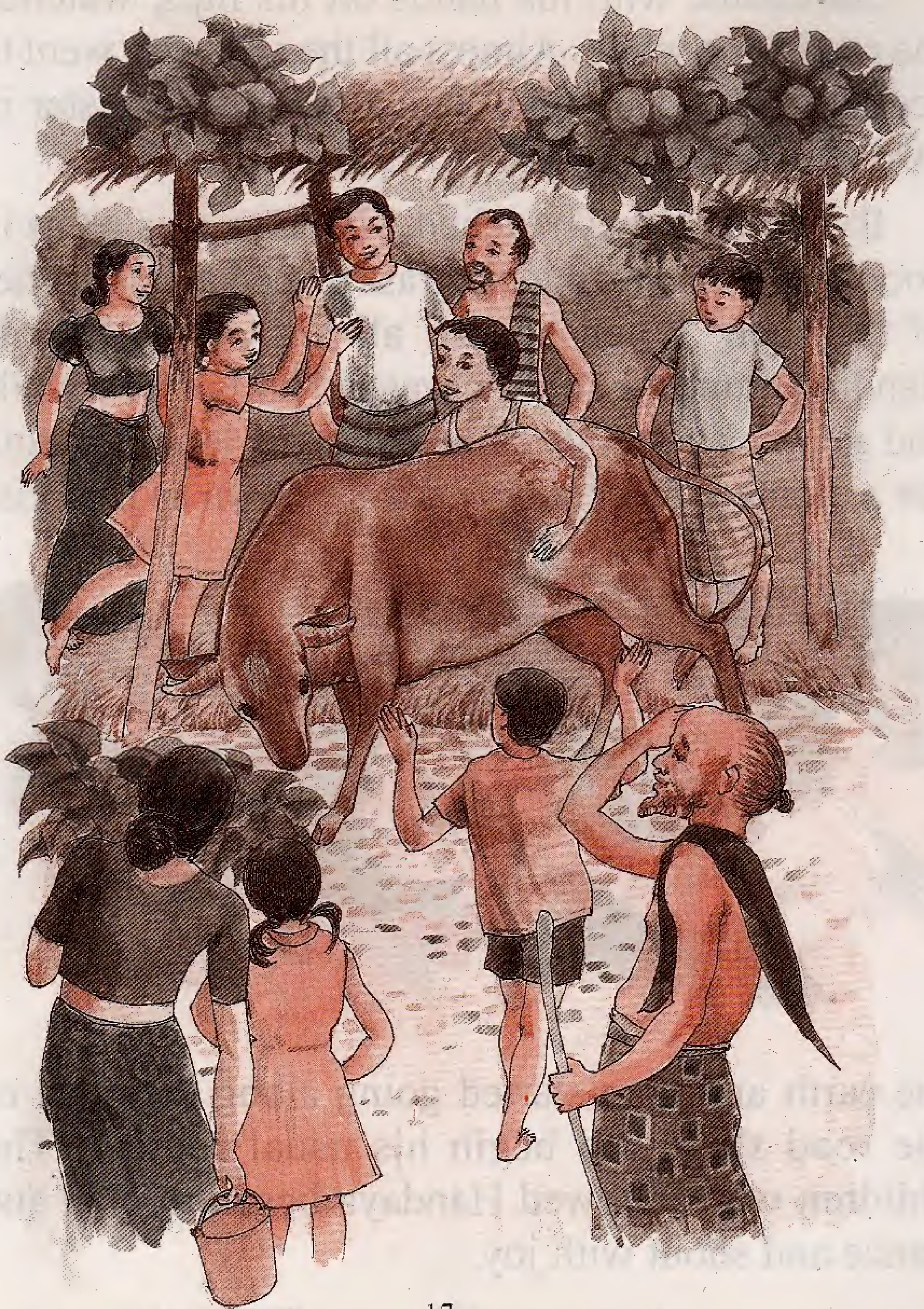
“Ha... Handaya is quite well now.”

“Really? Our Handaya is quite well now?”



“Yes, Mother. When I went there Handaya was up and wagging its tail. He looked at me as if with pride!”

“Oh, what a great thing that is! I believed that Handaya would be well soon,” Mother who was stroking Samantha's head affectionately looked at Father as she said it. In the meantime Indunila ran to Siriyawathie Aunty's place and gave her the good news. Aunty conveyed the news to the other neighbouring houses. In a moment it spread all over the village.



Samantha, with his hands on his hips, watched the road for a while. Almost all the villagers went to see Handaya. This time Samantha put his sister in his vehicle and went off to see Handaya.

By the time they reached, Handaya was up as in good health and eating the grass placed at one corner of the shed. When he saw all his village friends standing round the shed he wagged his tail for a while and stepping carefully came out. After looking about for a moment he bent his neck far down as if to kiss



the earth and then started going along the edge of the road slowly to begin his usual routine. The children who followed Handaya began to clap and dance and shout with joy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gunasena Vithana is a novelist, short story writer and a critic. He has written six novels, five collection of short stories and twenty six children books. He has received several National awards and also the International Lotus Literary award.



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